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# **Loyal Catholics and Revolutionary Patriots: National Identity and the Scots in Revolutionary Paris<sup>1</sup>**

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This article will look at two groups of Scots in revolutionary Paris: the clergy of the Scots College and the handful of radicals who sought refuge in the French capital. At the outset, it should be emphasised that these were two very small clusters, yet they were important because the individuals involved were forced to find ways of dealing with their Scottish and British identities in the starkest of circumstances, giving rise to a variety of telling responses. Since the clerics and radicals were under some considerable strain during the 1790s, they sometimes expressed their sense of identity in extreme ways. In so doing, they threw into bold relief the tensions inherent in the layered Scottish-British identity with which their compatriots had grappled since the Union of 1707. While the two groups were in obvious ways at the opposite ends of the political spectrum, both found their Britishness problematic.

Yet because the Catholic clergy were at the receiving end of more than one French revolutionary missile, in the end they were willing to play on their status as British subjects, since government support could help them restore the College and get compensation from the French. By contrast, the radicals – at least those who made the hazardous journey to France in the later 1790s – were in France precisely because they had fallen foul of the British government. Isolated – even among the Scottish reform movement back home, which stressed its essential loyalty to the union and to the crown – these Scots had nothing to lose and everything to gain from the French government by expressing their Scottish identity in an anti-British sense. The contrast is striking and it is precisely these differences that make it possible to explore the complexities of the relationships between Scottish and British identities. To further complicate matters, the Scottish expatriates in Paris had fraught relations with their Irish counterparts, and this, too, was reflected in their sense

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank all the seminar participants at the Scottish and Irish Diasporas Seminar, held at Trinity College Dublin in March 2007 under the auspices of the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen and organised by Dr Michael Brown and Professor Cairns Craig, for some exceptionally useful comments on the earlier version of this paper.

of identity. To understand how this small handful of Scots grappled with these problems, their role in the stormy waters of revolutionary politics in Paris in the late 1790s will be examined.

## I.

The Scottish clergy in Paris engaged in French politics in two ways. First, they were involved in defending the College against legislation levelled against the Catholic Church, particularly as regards its property (since the Constituent Assembly – for some compelling reasons – could not resist the rich pickings of ecclesiastical real estate, which was nationalised by decree on 2 November 1789). Secondly, the Scots lodged protests against the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (12 July 1790) and the clerical oath which followed on 27 November.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, the Scots secured the weighty support not only of the British government, through the good offices of the British *chargé d'affaires*, but also of an impressive figure from the French clergy, Abbé Seignelay Colbert of Castlehill, who in February 1792 attended a crucial meeting of what these days would be called the College's 'senior management'.

Colbert was a Scot by origin (he was born in Moray of Scottish parents in 1736), who graduated from the Scots College on his ordination and was elevated to the see of Rodez in 1781. Before the Revolution, he had reformist credentials and was one of the upper clergy elected to the Estates-General, where he was amongst the first of the bishops to defect to the Third Estate, soon to style itself the National Assembly. Although he opposed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and refused to take the clerical oath, he otherwise obeyed the law and implemented the new ecclesiastical order in his diocese. Moreover, he was no reactionary, but rather one of the 'Impartials', a group of right-wing deputies who agreed in principle with a constitutional monarchy, but not the type which took shape under the Constitution of 1791, which was far too radical for their taste.<sup>3</sup> The choice of Colbert as a friend for the College would not, as it turned out, help once the monarchists became equated with outright counter-revolution in the summer of the 1792, but earlier that year

<sup>2</sup> M.G. Rapport, 'A Community Apart? The Closure of the Scots College in Paris during the French Revolution', *Innes Review*, 53 (2002), 85–9.

<sup>3</sup> Edna Lemay (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Constituants, 1789–1791* (2 vols, Oxford, 1991), I, 229–30; Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780–1804* (Basingstoke, 2000), 16, 103–4, 116, 154; Brian M. Halloran, *The Scots College Paris 1603–1792* (Edinburgh, 1997), 217.

his political connections would still have been worth exploring. Moreover, the choice of ally provides a heavy hint as to the Scots clergy's own position in revolutionary politics: they were certainly conservative, but not reactionary. They supported a strong monarchy, but one which would be restrained by legal guarantees for its citizens and by a parliamentary body – albeit one with fewer powers than those arrogated by the existing National Assembly.

This impression is reinforced by the interesting connection that existed between the College Principal, Alexander Gordon, and the Genevan political journalist, Jacques Mallet du Pan, perhaps one of the most intelligent of the counter-revolutionary writers. Mallet du Pan was editor of the political section of the official government newspaper, the *Mercure de France*, at the outbreak of the Revolution, but he was critical of the absolute monarchy for being despotic and weak at the same time: the *ancien régime*, he had argued prophetically, was heading for disaster unless it reformed itself.<sup>4</sup> Mallet's conservative reformism seems to have attracted the attention of Principal Gordon, who submitted writings of his own to the *Mercure* on the very eve of the Revolution. Mallet du Pan was forced to pull them, as he explained to Gordon on 5 July 1789:

The pieces which I am returning to you, Monsieur, should have appeared in the *Mercure* last Saturday, but political circumstances have come to such a state that the censor did not dare approve publication without referring them to the Keeper of the Seals. On Thursday evening, that Minister intimated the most positive prohibition on having that article appear in the *Mercure*; this was communicated to me yesterday morning and in the evening I pulled the manuscript out of the printers. You should not be astonished, Monsieur, by the government's conduct: it has no more authority, it fears everyone, its defenders as much as its enemies. That article would inevitably have stirred up the Estates-General against the Minister who had approved it and against us.<sup>5</sup>

This letter is particularly intriguing for its direct evidence of an attempt by a Scottish expatriate to engage in political journalism in the crucial month of July 1789. The article does not seem to be in the Scots Catholic Archives in Edinburgh, but Mallet du Pan's letter shows that Gordon stood behind

<sup>4</sup> Frances Acomb, *Mallet du Pan (1749–1800). A Career in Political Journalism* (Durham, N.C., 1973), 203.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Mallet du Pan to Alexander Gordon, 5 July 1789, Scots Catholic Archives (hereafter SCA), Blairs Letters, 4/4/1.

the monarchy in the political crisis. Gordon and Mallet du Pan kept up their correspondence until the latter's death in 1800, which suggests that the two men respected each other's opinions.

During the Constituent Assembly, Mallet du Pan had political connections with the right-wing constitutional monarchists, the Monarchiens, like Pierre-Victor Malouet and Jean-Joseph Mounier. Indeed, he tended to promote their arguments in his commentaries in the *Mercur* on the debates of the National Assembly: they were opposed to 'despotism', but supported a stronger monarchy (such as an absolute rather than a merely suspensive veto) as against the 'anarchy' represented by their more radical opponents. Significantly for the clergy, Mallet du Pan opposed the clerical oath and lent his journalistic support to the non-jurors, but he also argued that some reform of the Church was necessary. For this most clear-sighted of conservative intellects, the *ancien régime* was not something to be lamented, as Edmund Burke appeared to do in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). There was no point in trying to put the clock back – and for this reason, he was denounced by hard-line reactionaries as no better than the Jacobins. When the war between France and Austria broke out in April 1792, Mallet du Pan was sent on a mission by the leading Monarchien politicians, including Malouet, to act as special emissary for the king. He was instructed to seek Austrian and Prussian assurances that their war aims did not involve territorial conquest at French expense, that their struggle was against the revolutionary 'faction' and not the people as a whole and that the conflict was being waged in the interest of all European sovereigns and their peoples. Mallet du Pan accepted the mission and left France – for good, as it turned out.<sup>6</sup>

During the exile of the last eight years of his life, Mallet du Pan periodically wrote to Gordon, who fled France for London in the blood-curdling days of September 1792. In his correspondence, he repeated – almost verbatim – many of the thoughts which he shared with his other European correspondents, including such well-placed figures as the British envoy to the Portuguese court. Gordon therefore had direct contacts with the more moderate wing of the counter-revolution: as Mallet du Pan at one point confided to the Scottish clergyman (through his son, Jean-Louis) in 1797, François Montlosier, who was cut from similar political cloth to the journalist, had been threatened with uncertain – but undoubtedly nasty – retribution from the ultra-royalist activist, the Comte d'Antraigues.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Acomb, *Mallet du Pan*, 210–52.

<sup>7</sup> 'In December he told one of my friends in Venice: *Montlosier frets over my thirst for*

The close connection between the College and Seignelay Colbert, as well as the private correspondence between Gordon and Mallet du Pan, suggests that the Scots Catholic clergy in Paris leaned heavily towards the French monarchists rather than the royalists and would have gone along with some moderate reform of church and state. This tallies with the notion of a Catholic clergy engaging with the mainstream of the political and intellectual life of the Scottish Enlightenment, otherwise traditionally regarded as a predominantly Presbyterian movement.<sup>8</sup> It also suggests a Catholic clergy which could live at peace with the British political system not only for pragmatic reasons of necessity (since their French hosts were no longer as hospitable as they had been before 1789), but also out of conviction.

## II.

This conviction was not shared by the Catholic clergy's fellow Scots among the radical exiles, chief of whom – primarily for symbolic reasons – was Thomas Muir. Significantly, one of his letters to the Directory prior his arrival in France, dated 20 May 1797, does not deal directly with politics at all. Instead – privately, at least – he appeared to be talking about living in modest retirement, writing his memoirs. He announced that he would arrive in France ‘without being of any use to the Republic – if my physical strength matched my inclinations, I would have asked for the honour of fighting your enemies on the frontiers – but, alas! That is impossible.’ He then wrote at length of how his modest wealth was left in Scotland, asking the French government for a two-year loan of 150,000 francs to buy a *domaine nationale* so that he could subsist until he had written a two-volume account of his exile and travels. This, he claimed ‘is awaited in England with the greatest impatience’ and would earn him £3000.<sup>9</sup>

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*vengeance: he has good reason to, for I will be the Marat of the counter-revolution, I will have a hundred thousand heads cut off – and his will be the first:* Jean-Louis Du Pan to Alexander Gordon, 8 May 1797, SCA, Blairs Letters, 4/113/15. Mallet du Pan's correspondence – and that of his son, Jean-Louis – with Gordon can be found in SCA, Blairs Letters, 4/70; 4/82; 4/105; 4/113. Their content may be compared with, for example, the letters published by J. de Pins, ‘La Correspondance de Mallet du Pan avec la Cour de Lisbonne’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 37 (1965), 468–84 and idem, ‘La Correspondance de Mallet du Pan avec la Cour de Lisbonne’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 38 (1966), 84–94.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1992), 352; M. Goldie, ‘The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment’, *Journal of British Studies*, 30 (1991), 40–62.

<sup>9</sup> Muir to the Directory, 1 Prairial V (20 May 1797), Archives du ministère des Affaires

He returned to this theme in a later letter, dated 29 December 1797, almost a month after his arrival in France, but with more explicitly political content. He asked for money on which to live, promising optimistically that it would be repaid 'by Scotland with interest and with enthusiasm'. He also pinned his republican colours firmly to his frail mast:

Other nations offered me asylum. Frigates were sent out to rescue me, as the Minister of Foreign Relations well knows. But my heart is entirely French. I have sacrificed everything for the sacred cause of the Republic. I have very little blood left in my veins, but the little which remains will be spilled once again.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the final protestation, these two letters to the foreign ministry read more like appeals for assistance in securing a modest retirement than an active appeal, *à la* Wolfe Tone, for French intervention in his homeland. Yet in 1798, Muir would certainly make political waves, less with the French than with the United Irish exiles.

The United Irishmen in Paris at the beginning of 1798 were experiencing considerable internal turmoil caused by personality clashes and political differences – and Muir, not innocently, stepped right into the dispute. One of the problems was that the revolutionary underground – in Ireland, England or Scotland – could usually only communicate with the French government through those rare agents who actually made the trip to Paris, or through exiles, many of whom had actually been out of their homeland for years and who were out of touch with the actual situation there. It often transpired that a messenger from one part of the British Isles was charged with delivering information on behalf of revolutionaries from another part, but Muir went beyond this and presumptuously claimed to be able to speak for an entire nation which was not his own. In a letter published in the *Moniteur* about a month after his arrival in Paris, he wrote bluntly: 'I am a United Irishman, I am a Scot, I can speak in the name of both Nations.' In a final flourish, he responded to a toast from the Minister of the *Police générale* (Sotin, a neo-Jacobin), which had been published in the *Ami des Lois*, by declaring: 'I reply to you, in the name of the Irish and the Scots, that we will break our chains over

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étrangères (Paris), Correspondance Politique, Angleterre (hereafter AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl.), 590, f. 321.

<sup>10</sup> Muir to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 9 Nivôse VI (29 December 1797), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 592, ff. 144–5.

the heads of our tyrants.<sup>11</sup> For Wolfe Tone, who read these and other articles which Muir contributed to the French newspapers, this was not only barefaced cheek, but it challenged his own authority with the Directory in Paris.

Now Muir was, technically, a member of the United Irishmen, having joined the organisation when he was briefly in Dublin in July 1793, just prior to his arrest on his return to Scotland, but quite why he thought that he could speak on behalf of that organisation is unclear. He had certainly presented the address of the United Irishmen to the Edinburgh Convention on 12 December 1792. This had been strenuously opposed by some of the delegates on the grounds that 'it contained treason, or at least misprision of treason'.<sup>12</sup> Muir had persuaded the delegates to hear the address and during the tumultuous debate that followed, he had pointedly claimed that Ireland, like Scotland, was a separate nation: 'we cannot consider ourselves as mowed and melted down into another country ... The people of Ireland *will* a reform, the Scotch *will* a reform. Is the Irish nation to be considered as a Scape Goat in this business?'<sup>13</sup> Muir almost certainly felt that he had earned his Irish stripes.

Muir had also struck up a friendship with William Drennan, who had fallen out with Tone in the summer of 1793, not least because he resented Tone's influence within the United Irishmen.<sup>14</sup> This was not only the time when the society was under a great deal of pressure because of the outbreak of war with France, but when Muir had briefly stepped ashore in Belfast and Dublin and was closely associated with Tone's *bête noire*, James Napper Tandy. Tandy had arrived in France in June 1797 and had tried to wrest the leadership of the United Irishmen from Tone. Muir's biographer, Christina Bewley, suspects that the Scotsman gravitated towards Tandy because he felt able to dominate the Irishman.<sup>15</sup> Tone's crushing judgment on Muir was set down in a famous diary entry of 1 February 1798, after Tone had endured a stormy meeting with the Scot, Tandy and other United Irish exiles:

... of all the vain, obstinate blockheads that ever I met, I never saw his equal. I could scarcely conceive such a degree of self-sufficiency

<sup>11</sup> *Moniteur*, no. 105, 15 nivôse VI; Francisque-Michel, *Les Écossais en France. Les Français en Écosse* (2 vols, London, 1862), II, 470.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Henry W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1912), 245.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 246–7.

<sup>14</sup> Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven & London, 1989), 223, 230.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 365–8; Christina Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill* (Oxford, 1981), 163–4.



to exist. He told us roundly that he knew as much of our country as we did, and would venture to say he had as much the confidence of the United Irishmen as we had; that he had no doubt we were very respectable individuals, but could only know us as such, having shown him no powers or written authority to prove that we had any mission.<sup>16</sup>

As Elaine McFarland has shown, the United Scotsmen – of whom Muir, owing to his long exile and global odyssey, could not have been a sworn-in member – were heavily influenced by the United Irishmen in terms of structure, ideology and diffusion, so it was understandable that revolutionaries of the one nationality ended up claiming to speak for those of the other.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes, it seems that they were actually asked to do so, and this may have been the case when the Irish expatriate William Duckett submitted a memorandum on Scotland to the Consulate in 1800, urging a French landing in Scotland. In it, he emphasised the Irish backbone of the United Scotsmen: ‘Scotland is organised on the same lines as Ireland. Societies of *United Scotsmen* are being organised everywhere. Irish refugees are very active in this organisation. They are very numerous in Paisley and in Glasgow.’<sup>18</sup>

Muir himself seems to have urged a French invasion of Scotland rather belatedly, when he appears to have been stung into action, possibly by his bruising encounter with Tone in February 1798. In an undated letter and memorandum which were finally submitted to the foreign ministry on 29 October 1800 (long after his death in January 1799 – so the actual timing of the two documents is unclear) – Muir sketched out a plan of action for Scotland, asking for one or two messengers whom he could meet outside of Paris, to whom he ‘could give instructions and arrange the plan of operation’. The Scots, he said, unlike the Irish, would not ‘represent the ridiculous and fatal comedy of O’Quoigley and O’Connor’, a reference to the arrests of the two Irishmen in Margate in February 1798 and the execution of James Coigley in June.<sup>19</sup> Since there is no mention of the Irish insurrection itself, this places the aforementioned letter and memorandum at some point

<sup>16</sup> William Theobald Wolfe Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (2 vols, Washington, D.C., 1826), II, 461–2.

<sup>17</sup> Elaine W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1994), 152–62.

<sup>18</sup> Duckett to the Consulate, Ventôse VIII (February/March 1800), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 593, ff. 174–5.

<sup>19</sup> Muir to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, submitted 29 October 1800, AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 594, ff. 53–4, 56–67.

between February and May 1798. In the document, Muir suggested using a James Kennedy as the agent in Scotland. Muir's mention of Kennedy implied that he still had some hope of making direct political contacts with Scottish radicals back home – and perhaps independently of the United Irishmen. Until then, much of the communication had been through the conduit of Irish revolutionaries. In a memoir to the Directory dated 4 October 1797, the ill-fated Catholic priest Coigley and the Presbyterian minister Arthur McMahon explained that they had fled Ireland and taken refuge in London the previous June, where they met members of the 'chief revolutionary committee of England', as well as:

a Delegate from the United Scotch, sent expressly to London to know how far the English Patriots were willing to assist their Brethren in Scotland and Ireland in the great work of overthrowing Tyranny – he gave to understand, that the Scotch Patriots were very powerful and ready to act in concert with those of England & Ireland at any moment – the subscribers are ready to attend when & where it may be judg'd necessary to answer any question that may arise from the foregoing or to perform any thing that may be in their Power. For their conduct [and] veracity they appeal to their countrymen now in Paris engaged in the same cause of Liberty.<sup>20</sup>

This document is intriguing, since it implies that there was a network of Scottish radicals working in France prior to Muir's arrival. Was this last appeal from the United Scotsmen a final flurry of activism? Which Scots – if there were any at all – did the unnamed Scottish delegate actually know in France? The Scots could not boast of the same revolutionary network exploited by the Irish, whose student body at the Irish College alone seems to have been such a fertile ground for nationalism and republicanism. Yet there was a small number of Scots who either made the hazardous trip to France, or who pursued rather erratic communications with the French government through intermediaries such as Coigley. Some Scottish names, including those of Thomas Graham, Robert Watson and James Smith, do appear in the correspondence of the French foreign ministry, linking them directly to revolutionary activity. In addition, in the memorandum which reached the foreign ministry in 1800, Muir remarked on two other Scots 'whom I most earnestly desire to see in

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<sup>20</sup> James Coigley and Arthur McMahon, 4 October 1797, AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 592, f. 43.

Paris', James Kennedy – already mentioned – and 'Neil' (possibly Angus) Cameron.<sup>21</sup>

It is also known that Muir made contact with his former university friends, the merchants John and Benjamin Sword, who were noted for their republican principles and who were in France in the hope of making a huge profit from the purchase and resale of British goods seized by French privateers. Revolution and Mammon could conveniently go together. In fact, the Sword brothers and Thomas Graham seem to have been important sources of more recent, if unreliably optimistic, information on Scotland for Muir.<sup>22</sup> 'Neil' Cameron, Muir claimed, 'has organised the *Highlanders* of Scotland'. This is almost certainly a reference to *Angus* Cameron, who was a dynamic leader of the United Scotsmen, who hailed from Lochaber and who had tried to turn the Militia Riots of 1797 into a revolutionary movement. He was arrested shortly thereafter, but released, possibly because he provided information to the government, although this is not proven. Muir noted that Cameron had been outlawed and was now hiding in London, adding (in a rather peculiar contradiction) that 'he could easily be found'. In any case, Cameron's reputation with Muir and the French was enough to make him a candidate for the 'Scottish Directory' proposed in the event of a French-backed revolution in Scotland. James Kennedy, Muir wrote, 'is equally well-informed of the state of the low country of Scotland and of England'.<sup>23</sup> Kennedy was a Paisley weaver with strong Paineite and republican leanings and a political poet, who was implicated in Robert Watt's 'Pike Plot' to seize Edinburgh Castle in 1794. He fled to London where he worked among the militants of the London Corresponding Society, after which he seems to have sailed for the safety of North America, although his precise fate is unknown.<sup>24</sup> If Muir hoped that Kennedy would soon join him in Paris, then he had been deceived.

Robert Watson was president of the London Corresponding Society. In October 1799, Watson and another expatriate Scot, James Smith, had

<sup>21</sup> Muir to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, submitted 29 October 1800, AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 594, ff. 56–67.

<sup>22</sup> Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill*, 167; H.W. Meikle, 'Two Glasgow Merchants in the French Revolution', *Scottish Historical Review*, 8 (1911), 149–58; McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, 169; Muir to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 Thermidor VI (29 July 1798), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 592, f. 204.

<sup>23</sup> Muir to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, submitted 29 October 1800, AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 594, ff. 56–67; McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland*, 160, 166–7, 178 (n. 88), 181.

<sup>24</sup> See Andrew Noble, 'Displaced Persons: Burns and the Renfrew Radicals' in Bob Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2005), 196–225.

approached the French foreign minister, asking to be charged with the management of the property of the English and Scottish Catholic colleges in France. They also asked for permission to use some of the revenue for the benefit of 'the Patriots of Great Britain', which incidentally also implied that, although they were Scottish – and quite consciously so, as will be shown – their role in the London Corresponding Society gave them a British perspective, too. This request was denied by the finance minister, on the grounds that the sale of the property had already been ordered by a law passed by the Council of Five Hundred on 24 July that year. Undeterred, three days later (19 October) Watson submitted a further memorandum asking for money to form a coalition amongst all the 'partisans of liberty' in London and to send a secret agent to the English capital to secure help for those patriots imprisoned in 'English Bastilles' thereby fomenting 'a general insurrection'. The man for the job, Watson claimed, was his associate James Smith, himself known amongst the leadership of the 'democratic parties'. Smith had been a member of the Edinburgh Convention and was, according to Watson, a close friend of Thomas Muir 'no less attached than he to the interests of France'.<sup>25</sup>

This supports the idea that there existed a small network of contacts between the Scottish expatriates in France and the leadership of the revolutionary underground in Scotland. It may have centred on Muir or, possibly, Robert Watson, but its small size and poor communication lines meant that it was very frail and tentative, if it existed at all. Certainly, it never managed to slip out of the shadow of the United Irishmen. It is perhaps of little surprise, then, that the last trace of Muir in the Paris archives – his memorandum sketching out a plan for a French invasion of Scotland – appears to have been misplaced and forgotten, only to resurface amongst the folios dated more than a year after his death.

### III.

The intriguing immersion of a small number of Scots in French revolutionary politics sheds light on the tensions that could develop between Scottish and British identities. As the Scots Catholic clergy and the expatriate revolutionaries navigated their respective ways through their political entanglements, they

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<sup>25</sup> Minister of Finance to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 24 Vendémiaire VIII (16 October 1799); Watson to the Directory, 27 Vendémiaire VIII (19 October 1799), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 593, ff. 16, 18.

expressed themselves in ways which grappled with this sense of layered or dual identity. And here comparisons between the reactions of the clergy and those of the radicals are useful. In his article on the radical poets of Paisley in the 1790s, Andrew Noble suggests that writers like James Kennedy and Alexander Wilson saw themselves ‘as both Scottish and (not *or*) British poets, albeit not Hanoverian Britain’. Indeed, it made strategic sense for Scottish radicals to think in terms of a wider British context. While an Irish republic might conceivably have survived – separated as it was by a body of sea from monarchist England – an independent, revolutionary Scotland would probably not have lasted long against its more powerful southern neighbour, with whom it shared a rather porous border. Noble also suggests that in the exchanges between the English and Scottish radical movements, there were inherent nationalist tensions.<sup>26</sup>

Muir certainly gave vent to such tensions. On 3 March 1798 (13 Ventôse VI), he submitted a ‘picture of the situation of the three nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland’ to the Directory. He dismissed the claims of British expatriates, which he had heard when he was in Paris in 1793, that the English were only waiting for a French invasion to rise up and overthrow their government. Instead, most English people did not support the French Republic because:

there is not a more ignorant or barbaric people in all Europe. They do not educate themselves, they do not read (it is in the government’s interest to perpetuate their ignorance: give that populace meat and beer, and they would slit the throats of their fathers). They are a people without character: today they will cry ‘Long live the *King*’, tomorrow they will shout ‘Long live the *Republic*’.<sup>27</sup>

When she quotes this same passage, Christina Bewley chastises Muir for his blinkered Anglophobia, but this outburst is also notable because of its timing. After his first two letters of 1797, this memorandum was the first in which Muir offered the French government anything resembling a concrete analysis of the state of the radical opposition in Britain. Perhaps – after three months in France – he was at last trying to prove his practical use to the French government, beyond being a mere propaganda symbol. If so, then he was actually tapping

<sup>26</sup> Noble, ‘Displaced Persons’, 197, 214–5.

<sup>27</sup> Muir to the Directory, 13 Ventôse VI (3 March 1798), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 592, f. 161.

into the uncompromising spirit of the Directorial government which emerged after the Fructidor coup (September 1797) which had purged monarchists or crypto-monarchists from the legislature and the executive, repudiated the peace talks with the British and prosecuted the war more aggressively. If Muir's anti-English tirade was calculated to ensure a sympathetic response to his earlier calls for financial assistance, it was well directed.

Muir had by this stage directly engaged in the political scrapping among the expatriate revolutionaries in Paris, putting Tone's nose out of joint. Was this Muir changing tack and setting course away from a modest, memoir-writing retirement, towards an attempt to imitate Tone and persuade the French government to turn their attention away from England and look elsewhere – even to Scotland? Here, too, the timing is significant, since Napoleon Bonaparte's *armée de l'Angleterre* was preparing for a descent on the British Isles. In the atmosphere of Anglophobia this created, the Directory had ordered, on 26 February 1798, the expulsion of all English-speaking people from the northern maritime cities.<sup>28</sup> With Anglophone foreigners under pressure, this was an opportune moment for Muir to join in the chorus of anti-English disapproval and to remind the French authorities that Scotland was different from England.

Muir would not be alone in doing so. On 29 October 1799, Robert Watson made his call to the Directory's foreign minister, Reinhard, for help in fomenting insurrection in the British capital. Watson took the opportunity to imagine a future which shows that, while thinking in British terms, he also had a strong sense of his own Scottish identity. Come the long-awaited revolution in the British Isles, he envisaged that Scotland would be a separate republic:

There is in Paris a library belonging to the Scots College, which contains many precious works, both printed and in manuscript. This library is the last monument to the political independence of Scotland. I ask that it be placed in our care. Its sale could only yield a modest amount, and its conservation, other than that it would be of eminent use for us, would be still more a great source of satisfaction for our compatriots.<sup>29</sup>

One wonders what Alexander Innes, the College's intrepid Procurator, would have said, had he known of this request. In any case, it went unheeded: Watson

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 2000), 271.

<sup>29</sup> Watson to the Directory, 27 Vendémiaire VIII (19 October 1799), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 593, f. 18.

repeated it on 3 December 1799 to Talleyrand, Bonaparte's first foreign minister.<sup>30</sup> One suspects that with the Directory on its last legs in October 1799 and the new Consular régime trying to find its footing both ministers had far more pressing matters to deal with.

Muir also tried to distinguish the Scots from the Irish – and since the United Irish exiles were far more numerous and organised in Paris, he had good cause to do so. While Duckett had emphasised that the revolutionary underground in Scotland had been organised primarily along Irish lines and by Irish agents, Muir insisted that the Scots would act differently from the Irish: 'I never cease to repeat to the French Government, that Scotland never will be precipitated like Ireland into premature and ill combined insurrection'. It is, however, against the English that Muir's views of the Scots were defined. Suggesting subversion amongst the British armed forces, he said that Scottish soldiers 'are deeply tinctured with revolutionary principles', while Scottish sailors 'are unlike the English. As brave in the combat, they are better educated, better informed, more attached to their National Independency and more determined to throw off the yoke'. There could be a decisive uprising in London, but it would only be by virtue of 'that immense ignorant and debauched populace, fermented by *Misery* into *Insurrection*'. For revolution to occur in London, one needed leaders who were men of courage and honesty whose habits had brought them into direct contact with the people who followed 'common occupations'. Having sketched out his own prejudices in such stark terms already, Muir need hardly have added that it was difficult to find a sufficient number of such men in England. 'In that country, there exists hardly a *middle* class. Information is almost entirely confined to the highest ranks of life and literature'. In other words, one would look in vain for a social layer of educated, politicised artisans who could lead a proper revolution and not just a riot born of social distress. There were some in London, but 'they too are mostly Scotchmen', Muir said, citing Thomas Hardy, George Ross and William Ross. For good measure he added, 'In Scotland, there is not the same difficulty. The lower orders in general are the best informed'.<sup>31</sup>

The Scottish clergy, by contrast, could not be so strident in their expressions of Scottish identity – and they certainly could not cast it in anti-English or anti-British terms. There may have been a confessional and/or Christian

<sup>30</sup> Watson to Talleyrand, 12 Frimaire VIII (3 December 1799), AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 593, ff. 36, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Muir to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, submitted 29 October 1800, AMAE, Corr. Pol., Angl., 594, ff. 56–67.



sense of identity which for them overarched national divisions: confessional because the Irish, the Scots and the English Catholic expatriate communities periodically worked together in their efforts to safeguard their institutions in France; Christian because more broadly the French Revolution, particularly during the whirlwind of 'dechristianisation' in the autumn of 1793, appeared to be an attack on all religious belief, not just Catholicism. It seemed that Catholics and Protestants had more in common with each other when faced with the alleged 'atheism' of French republicanism. Indeed, the influx of fleeing Catholic clergy – French, Scottish, Irish and English – into the British Isles during the emigration of the 1790s ultimately helped to erode the more 'Protestant' prejudices associated with 'Britishness'.<sup>32</sup> While the Scots Catholics could feel part of this more open definition of 'Britishness', their Irish brethren were more wary, and this was reflected in their language. Father Walsh of the Irish College in Paris, writing to the *Comité des secours publics* on 16 December 1794 to ask that the institution's property be restored, could bluntly state that the French 'had taken under its protection the Irish chased from their country by British despotism'.<sup>33</sup> Neither the Scots nor the English Catholic clergy felt able to express themselves in such colourful political rhetoric, even when addressing officials of the French government.

The result of all this was not only that the Scots, English and Irish expressed their own sense of identity differently, but also that French perceptions of these three nationalities seem to have varied. A report to the Committee of Public Assistance, dated 12 Ventôse III (2 March 1795) and sent on to the Committee of Public Safety, spoke of 'former refugees chased from an enemy country in which, since time immemorial, they have not been admitted to any civil or military office'. This could have applied equally to the Scots and English Catholics, but the report was speaking about the Irish College and its property in Paris. Although it was not stated explicitly, the Irish clergy in Paris were in a more difficult position, because of the *political* choices which they had made. The clergy and students of the Irish Colleges could not return home 'without danger, since the appeal for them to do so was made, and with

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<sup>32</sup> Kirsty Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Émigrés in London, 1789–1802* (Basingstoke, 1999), 157–60; Dom A. Bellenger, 'Fearless Resting Place: The Exiled French Clergy in Great Britain, 1789–1815' in Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel (eds), *The French Émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789–1814* (Basingstoke, 1999), 218–9, 225.

<sup>33</sup> John Baptist Walsh to Citizen Jubé, 26 Frimaire III (16 December 1794), AMAE, Fonds Ancien, Affaires Diverses Politiques, France, Carton 10, dossier 233.



which they refused to comply'.<sup>34</sup> The Irish also seem to have been perceived as more 'republican' than their Scottish or English counterparts. When, for example, the students of the Irish College attempted to regain access to their funds, which had been either frozen or confiscated during the Terror, the list included two former students who were now serving with the French army. One was a surgeon with the Army of the Rhine, while the other, James O'Maloney, was fighting in the Vendée with the Army of the West. While the list was compiled by the staff of the Irish College, a member of the *Comité des secours publics* scribbled in the margin next to O'Maloney's name that he had also fought two campaigns on the Rhine and had taken '2 balles dans le corps'.<sup>35</sup>

The impact of *French* perceptions of Scotland in these circumstances was important, since the French Romantic 'discovery' of Scotland in the pages of Sir Walter Scott and the travel writing of the first decades of the nineteenth century naturally built on the prior, eighteenth-century French awareness of Scotland, which involved, amongst other influences, the widespread popularity of Ossian. Napoleon himself was an avid reader and had an 'Ossianic' temple built in the grounds of Malmaison, the home of Joséphine. The activities of Scottish expatriates in France did raise some awareness among French revolutionary officialdom and even amongst the public of a distinct Scottish identity. Watson, as we have seen, stressed the importance of the Scots College library as a repository of evidence to Scotland's past independence. The revolutionaries themselves seem to have understood that there was some propaganda value in the Scottish radicals – which might explain the Committee of Public Safety's order of 18 February 1794 for 'all necessary measures to deliver Muir, Palmer and Margarot and intercept the vessel which is carrying them into exile'.<sup>36</sup>

When, after his epic circumnavigation of the globe, Muir set foot on the dockside at Bordeaux on 28 November 1797, he received a tumultuous reception. One of the nine toasts drunk included one raised to the Army of England which, led by Bonaparte, would soon 'unite the Thames with the Seine, and have resound on their free river banks, and on the rocks of

<sup>34</sup> Report to Comité des Secours Publics, 12 Ventôse III (2 March 1795), AMAE, Fonds Ancien, Affaires Diverses Politiques, France, Carton 10, dossier 233.

<sup>35</sup> 'État des Irlandois en droit de réclamer un traitement sur leurs propres fonds', n.d., but early Year III[?] (September/October 1794), AMAE, Fonds Ancien, Affaires Diverses Politiques, France, Carton 10, dossier 233.

<sup>36</sup> F.-A. Aulard (ed.), *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public* (28 vols, Paris, 1898), XI, 242.

Scotland and Ireland, the cherished airs of glory and liberty!<sup>37</sup> The toast explicitly recognised the separateness of the three nations, and though one can imagine some Scots and Irish bristling at having their verdant landscapes reduced to the status of rocks, it is quite possible that Ossianic influences were at play in the choice of words, giving rise to the image of a bard perched on a rocky outcrop.<sup>38</sup> The political significance of Scottish distinctiveness was made explicit in Paris by Pierre David, a poet, diplomat and orientalist, who announced Muir's imminent arrival in the capital in the *Moniteur* on 2 December.<sup>39</sup> After lauding Muir as an example for all 'martyrs of liberty', David outlined the history of Scotland's turbulent relations with England:

The Scots had not forgotten their ancient independence, the massacre of their ancestors, the tragic death of their last queen, the expulsion of the Stuarts from the throne of Great Britain: those memories, the sentiment of their poverty, the shocking contrast which it offers alongside English opulence, and perhaps, finally, the example of our revolution, became the causes of the insurrectionary movements which arose in Scotland in 1792, and in which Thomas Muir played one of the leading roles.

Scottish radicalism, for David, was a logical outgrowth of Scotland's past and its grievances with England. Yet the presence of Muir also informed the self-image of revolutionary France. Paris, David claimed, was 'that capital of the republican world, that meeting place of all victims escaped from despotism'. Muir, David wrote, had arrived in 'the land of independence and hospitality; he enters France at the moment that the *Grande Nation* threatens England, and is preparing to realise the project which he had conceived.'<sup>40</sup>

#### IV.

This article has focused on a numerically small group of people, but the attention given to them by historians of the French Revolution, of Scottish radicalism and of Scottish Catholicism raises the question of how exiles

<sup>37</sup> *Moniteur*, no. 105, 15 Nivôse VI.

<sup>38</sup> I thank Professor Cairns Craig for this observation.

<sup>39</sup> Bewley, *Muir of Huntershill*, 161.

<sup>40</sup> *Moniteur*, no. 72, 12 Frimaire VI.

can fit into 'mainstream' histories. This is not an easy question to answer, since the tiny numbers of Scots clerics and radical exiles are not particularly representative of Scottish society in general, nor do they lend themselves to fruitful sociological analysis in the way that the larger waves of migration do.<sup>41</sup> The answer is therefore to be found in their cultural or symbolic importance, in three ways. First, the expatriates examined here were vocal and had direct contact with the French government, so they had an influence on official French perceptions of the Scots. 'Le fameux Thomas Muir' and 'l'infortuné Wolfe Tone' may have been exceptional and far from representative of most Scots and Irish, but they made an important contribution to the shaping of their own country's image abroad. Sometimes in quite peculiar ways, they raised official and public awareness of the differences between the different parts of the British Isles. For a quite different purpose, the exiled Scots, Irish and English clergy played a similar role. In this sense, these expatriates presented different images of Scotland to the wider world: they might well have been *distorted* images, but they were still influential, particularly in France in a period when French intellectuals and travellers were 'discovering' the country.<sup>42</sup>

Secondly, the very experience of exile or expatriation tends to make problems of identity more acute for the expatriate than it might be for his or her fellow-citizens in the original country. The very fact of exile, emigration or diaspora creates an immediate common link between the expatriates, since their own nationality is what distinguishes them from the host community. The predicament of Scottish radical exiles and the Scots Catholic clergy in Paris therefore gave rise to expressions of national identity, Scottish and British, sometimes in the strongest of terms. Above all, it cast up two radically different views of Scottishness: the one republican, nationalist and anti-British; the other, politically moderate and reconciling itself to 'Britishness'. These represent the two poles between which most Scots fell as they sought to reconcile the tension between their Scottish and British identities.

While the more radical of the Scots political exiles tended to throw their Scottish identities into greater relief, thinking in British terms primarily out of strategic concerns, the clergy played a much more cautious and in a sense a more complex game, stressing their Britishness while never losing sight of their

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, J.M. Brock, *The Mobile Scot: A Study of Emigration and Migration, 1861–1911* (Edinburgh, 1999). For a lively, narrative approach, see Marjory Harper, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> See, amongst others, Peter France and John Renwick, 'France and Scotland in the Eighteenth Century' in James Laidlaw (ed.), *The Auld Alliance: France and Scotland over Seven Hundred Years* (Edinburgh, 1999), 89–104.

Scottishness. This was especially evident when, under the restored Bourbon monarchy, the opportunity arrived to claim compensation for the loss of property during the Revolution. During the negotiations between the British and French governments in 1823 – six years prior to Catholic Emancipation – the question arose as to whether British Catholic property should be included, since it had been acquired originally as part of a movement of opposition to earlier Protestant governments in Britain and because it could be defined as ecclesiastical property, whose sale was recognised by the French Constitutional Charter of 1814. The Scottish Roman Catholic prelate Alexander Paterson was provoked into a furious defence of his congregation in a letter to one of the British commissioners involved, in which he emphasised their loyalty as British subjects. ‘We were surely British subjects, holders of British property, in 1793 ... we suffered in the day of punishment as British subjects; are we not to be awarded as such in the day of retribution?’, Paterson demanded. It was immaterial that the former owners of the Scots College property ‘might have been called Jesuits or Jansenists, or as the adherents to the old cause of the Stuarts were called in Scotland, they were perhaps staunch Jacobites’, since ‘the sins of these fathers’ ought not to be ‘visited upon the children of Scotch Catholics in the reign of George the Fourth’. He finished with a flourish in which he laid an optimistic claim on behalf of the Scots Catholic clergy to the civil liberties promised by Britishness:

In this happy land of civil and religious liberty, equal justice will be administered to all. As British subjects, who suffered as such in 1793, we will be awarded as such in 1823, and allowed to settle in our native land, where religious wars are at an end: where we live with our Protestant and Scotch countrymen as friends and brothers. No man in Scotland quarrels with his fellow-brother for what was done by those before them ... No man in Scotland thinks it unlawful to allow us to abide by the dictates of our conscience, and to teach our people, both by word and example, to fear God and to honour the king.<sup>43</sup>

Paterson was reiterating what many people had come to believe in the years immediately before Emancipation: that Britishness *and* Scottishness could

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<sup>43</sup> Alexander Paterson, ‘To --- McKenzie, Esq., one of the Honorable British Commissioners appointed to liquidate the Claims of British Subjects on the French Government’, SCA, ad CA2/11. I thank Dr Christine Johnson, former Keeper of the Scots Catholic Archives, for a copy of this memorandum.

overarch the confessional divide, while the former could also accommodate a separate sense of Scottish identity. There is none the less in Paterson's language an implicit threat that if the British state were to fail in its duty of securing justice for its subjects, then the Scots Catholics might very well take refuge in their Scottishness, leaving only a loose dynastic loyalty to the king in the place of a deeper sense of Britishness.

Paterson's rhetoric points to the third way in which the responses of expatriates to their changing circumstances might fit into broader historical narratives. In his article on the Scots Catholic mission, Jim McMillan suggests that 'minorities need to be studied as well as majorities, to ensure that history is genuinely inclusive and not merely the propaganda of the victors'.<sup>44</sup> The role of such minorities is rarely passive and, although exiles in particular have a tendency to wallow from time to time in their status as victims, this should not distract from their often active efforts to shape the political and social developments of their original country. In the case of the Scots Catholic clergy, their response to the French Revolution was not only 'negative' in that they were pushed away from their French hosts towards the only viable alternative protector, the British government. They also played a positive role in shaping a sense of Scottish Catholic identity that could reconcile itself to Britishness and a Protestant state. This could be a means of staking their claim to the freedoms Britain was supposed to offer its loyal subjects. In this sense, the small network of Scottish Catholic clergy represented by the mission and its institutions in Europe, and in France in particular, played a small but influential role in preparing Scottish and perhaps British Catholics for emancipation, which finally came in 1829.

At one level, therefore, the study of expatriates is a way of setting national histories into a wider international context. At another level, since expatriates can be victims of persecution or people who have in some way lost out, it shows how the underdogs might still have an influence on the 'victors'. To return to the case at hand, while it is important not to overstate the role of the relatively small network of Scots Catholic clergy, the response of those in France to the challenges of the 1790s suggests that the wider Catholic community played an important role in its own emancipation by 1829. The study of exiles, of expatriate communities and of larger diasporas is not, therefore, only a question of making history inclusive (an admirable goal in

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<sup>44</sup> Jim F. McMillan, 'Mission Accomplished? The Catholic Underground' in T.M. Devine and J.R. Young (eds), *Eighteenth-Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), 91.

itself), but it also provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which wider, trans-national networks can have an impact on domestic developments. This is particularly germane to current trends in writing on Scottish history, which has all-too-often (and usually quite unfairly) been accused of ‘parochialism’. There may well be, as T.C. Smout has recently suggested, some way to go before this criticism is fully addressed.<sup>45</sup> Yet there is no doubt that scholars of Scottish history are enmeshing their subject ever deeper into the contexts of European, Atlantic and imperial history. This means that small groups of expatriates and larger migrant communities are no longer just colourful footnotes, but are – or will become – integral to Scottish historical narratives.

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<sup>45</sup> T.C. Smout, ‘Scottish History in the Universities since the 1950s’, *History Scotland*, 7 (2007), 49–50.

